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General debate on national experience in population matters: adolescents and youth

Statement submitted by Salvation Army, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.9/2012/2.

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Statement

Introduction

The Salvation Army welcomes the priority theme of the forty-fifth session of the Commission on Population and Development, "Adolescents and youth", and submits the present statement to highlight: (a) the often-overlooked relationship between poverty, youth migration and human trafficking; and (b) the positive role that young people can play in eradicating human trafficking.

The current generation of young people is the largest the world has ever known. According to the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, approximately 2 billion of the world's 7 billion people are young people between the ages of 10 and 24, the majority of whom live in developing countries. Many young people of working age are unemployed. While the most powerful predictor of being trafficked as a child is being female, children and youth who are impoverished or marginalized are more susceptible to exploitation, abuse and violence at the hands of unscrupulous traffickers and labour brokers who take advantage of their economic desperation and yearning for a better life. According to data available on the website of the Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking, 98 per cent of victims of forced commercial sexual exploitation and 56 per cent of victims of forced economic exploitation are women and girls. We are concerned that vulnerable youth may be trafficked for sex, domestic servitude, cheap or bonded labour, marriage or organs, and that adolescents and youth who choose to migrate — domestically or internationally — may become vulnerable to trafficking or other forms of exploitation if they cannot secure decent employment in their host communities.

Relationship between poverty, youth migration and human trafficking

The relationship between poverty and trafficking is recognized in a number of international instruments. The Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, the guiding document of the Commission, recognized that "[c]hildren in poverty are at high risk for ... falling prey to labour exploitation [and] trafficking", and established as a central principle of human rights-based development the importance of protecting children from "all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sale, trafficking, sexual abuse, and trafficking in its organs".

The international community has recognized human trafficking as an area warranting immediate international action by adopting the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention on Transnational Organized Crime. Other noteworthy international commitments designed to combat human trafficking include the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; the Convention concerning the Abolition of Forced Labour; the Convention concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour; and the Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and

Practices Similar to Slavery, which supplements the Slavery Convention. These covenants and conventions are legally binding on the States that are party to them.

It is axiomatic that human trafficking results in myriad civil, political, economic and social rights violations, but it is also driven by human rights violations, such as gender-based discrimination that fuels the demand for commercial sexual exploitation and the lack of access to education, decent work and an adequate standard of living. Adolescents and youth who are already vulnerable because of poverty, minority or orphan status, or who are otherwise marginalized, are at a higher risk of further human rights violations as a result of trafficking.

The role of adolescents and youth as agents of change in eradicating human trafficking

Adolescents and youth, comprising over one fourth of the world's population, have a critical role to play in eradicating human trafficking. Youth participation is a central principle of the human rights regime that governs children's rights. Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child enshrines the fundamental right of children to be heard, including in the context of Government decision-making. As emphasized by the Committee on the Rights of the Child in its general comment No. 12 of the Convention (CRC/C/GC/12), "[c]hildren have increasingly become a powerful force in the prevention of child rights violations" including with respect to "combating child exploitation". The Committee has further recognized that "[c]hildren should be consulted in the formulation of legislation and policy related to ... problem areas and involved in the drafting, development and implementation of related plans and programmes". We note in this regard the enormous potential of adolescents and youth, empowered with knowledge to prevent and respond to human trafficking, to influence their peer groups through informal dialogue, story sharing, peer education and social media to mobilize against modern day slavery in all its forms.

Youth anti-trafficking initiatives undertaken by the Salvation Army highlight the potential of young people as partners in fighting human trafficking. For instance, the Salvation Army has facilitated forums for young people to develop communication strategies to combat human trafficking through creative arts. Through art, youth express their reactions to human trafficking, thereby acknowledging victims in their age groups and strengthening their capacity for peer advocacy responses. We have also facilitated the participation of young people at United Nations events through panel discussions in the areas of the girl child and trafficking. Information about these events is available on our website, and demonstrates the capacity of youth as agents of change.

Policymakers, in collaboration with civil society, should consider how best to give a voice to adolescents and youth who have been victims of and who advocate against human trafficking. We call upon the Commission and Member States to take concrete actions to collaborate with young anti-trafficking advocates in human trafficking awareness campaigns and the development of policy responses. In this connection, we offer the following principles to guide effective youth advocacy strategies:

- Address issues of injustice.
- Design strategies to alter systems.
- Value vulnerable people as agents of change.
- Offer expertise to implement objectives.
- Convince power structures to alter policies.
- Access like-minded people to join the cause.
- Change policies, practices and perceptions.
- Yearn for justice that leads to sustainability.

Recommendations for addressing the trafficking of youth in the context of migration and development

We conclude by recommending actions that the Commission and Member States can take to more effectively address the trafficking of young persons in the context of internal and transnational migration.

Recognize the link between poverty, migration and trafficking

- Make the links between poverty, gender inequality, migration and trafficking explicit in relevant laws, policies and plans of action.
- Develop humane and well-managed migration policies to prevent the exploitation and trafficking of adolescents and youth who migrate within and between countries.
- Provide adolescents and youth with information and resources on safe migration, how to find decent work, dangers to be aware of, whom to contact for help and how to ensure that job offers abroad are safe and genuine.
- Improve monitoring and reporting of internal and transnational trafficking trends. Improved data collection, including disaggregation of migration and trafficking data based on age, gender and nationality, is required to increase collective understanding of human trafficking, adequately protect the rights of young people and develop evidence-based anti-slavery policies.
- Collaborate with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and others to develop an international mechanism to monitor trends and patterns of trafficking in persons, including adolescents and youth.
- Invest in education and training programmes to empower adolescents and youth to become self-sufficient and contribute to their national economies.

Adolescents and youth as agents of change

- Expand opportunities for adolescents and youth to participate in anti-trafficking policy development, implementation and advocacy, for example through youth forums, national youth councils and community-service initiatives.
- Prioritize adolescents and youth in the funding of national and local development programmes.

- Increase awareness and education about human trafficking among vulnerable populations by engaging young people as peer trainers.
- Create space for more active participation of youth at annual sessions of the Commission and in the ongoing work of the Commission.

Note: The statement is endorsed by the following non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Council: Carmelite NGO, Center for Migration Studies of New York, Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, Company of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, Congregations of St. Joseph, Franciscans International, Gray Panthers, International Council of Jewish Women, Passionists International, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries, UNANIMA International, United States Federation for Middle East Peace and Zonta International.